

this process and willingness and commitment to help Senator GRASSLEY and me to get GAO's recommendations implemented. His commitment to help us pursue our legislative proposals next year is sincerely appreciated.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 3408) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate immediately proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations on today's Executive Calendar: Calendar No. 893; provided further that the Foreign Relations Committee be discharged from consideration of the following nominations and that the Senate proceed to those en bloc: Senator COLEMAN (PN2044) and Senator BOXER (PN2043).

I further ask unanimous consent that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then return to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The nominations were considered and confirmed, as follows:

#### DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Cindy Lou Courville, of Virginia, to be Representative of the United States of America to the African Union, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

#### UNITED NATIONS

Norman B. Coleman, of Minnesota, to be a Representative of the United States of America to the Sixty-first Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Barbara Boxer, of California, to be a Representative of the United States of America to the Sixty-first Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

### ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand in adjournment until 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, tomorrow, September 21. I further ask that following the prayer and the pledge, the morning hour be deemed to have expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved, and the Senate proceed to a period of morning business for up to 30 minutes, with the first 15 minutes under the

control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the final 15 minutes under the control of the majority leader or his designee; further, that following morning business, the Senate resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 6061, the Secure Fence Act, and further, that notwithstanding the adjournment of the Senate, all time count against the motion under rule XXII.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## PROGRAM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today, we unanimously invoked cloture on the motion to proceed to the border fence act by a vote of 94 to 0. Unless an agreement is reached to begin earlier, we will begin consideration of that bill no later than 5:45 tomorrow afternoon. We will update Senators as to the voting schedule as we attempt to reach agreement on this bill, as well as any other legislative or executive items that may be considered.

### MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—H.R. 503

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will state the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 503) to amend the Horse Protection Act to prohibit the shipping, transporting, moving, delivering, receiving, possessing, purchasing, selling, or donation of horses and other equines to be slaughtered for human consumption, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask for its second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to my own request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

### ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in conclusion, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in adjournment under the previous order following the remarks of the Democratic leader and Senator HATCH.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The minority leader.

### AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was in my office and listened to the distinguished senior Senator from Idaho talk about the bill that is before the Senate, the so-called fence bill. I have great respect for the distinguished senior Senator. We have served together in the House and the Senate. He talked with

great emotion about the agricultural workers and how people are losing crops as a result of not having sufficient agricultural workers and that it was extremely important that we have agricultural worker legislation.

I heard my friend, the distinguished senior Senator from California, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, talk about agricultural workers and how important they are. She gave vivid illustrations of how they are important. I agree with both, but I am stunned that the Senator from Idaho appears to only be talking and not being meaningful in what he is saying about agricultural workers.

"Congress Daily PM," which is a publication put out on a daily basis by the National Journal, says as follows:

Senator Larry Craig, Republican of Idaho, would like to offer his amendment which would streamline certification for migrant farm workers, language that was included in the Senate's immigration package.

Listen to this one, though, this final sentence:

Craig spokesman said the Senator would not offer his amendment if it would hold up consideration of the House-passed bill.

We have a bill before the Senate. No one has any intent of holding up the bill, but there are some important amendments that people want to offer. According to the Senator from Idaho, he feels his agricultural workers provision is pretty important. Then why shouldn't we be able to offer some amendments on this? Why shouldn't we be able to offer one amendment, an agricultural workers amendment? Why shouldn't we be able to offer two amendments, three amendments with time on them?

I am told the majority leader is going to fill the tree—that is a buzzword around here for having the majority lock up this legislation so no amendments are possible.

My friend from Idaho cannot have it both ways. He cannot be righteously indignant about the fact we are not having an opportunity to help agricultural workers and then, in effect, throw in the towel and say he is going to do nothing about it.

He is part of the majority party; we are not. We cannot do much about it, but he can.

### MIDDLE-CLASS SQUEEZE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I want the record to reflect that I appreciate very much Senator STABENOW, Senator REED, and Senator SARBANES coming here today and talking about something we haven't talked about much in recent weeks. The Republicans wanted to make this September "security month." So we have devoted all of our time talking about the failure of the war in Iraq and the war on terrorism. We know that the war in Iraq has been a diversion to the real war on terror, but that is what they want to talk about.

I am so grateful that my friends came and talked about the economy. It

is an issue that deserves to be a top priority of this Congress but has been ignored for years—the need to strengthen America's middle class. Our country has always been a land of opportunity. As a nation, we take pride that all Americans, no matter where they begin in life, have the opportunity to work hard, get ahead, and prosper. It is called the American dream, and it is what our country is all about.

Unfortunately, while it is still possible for Americans to do well, it is getting harder and harder all the time. America's middle class faces ever-increasing obstacles. Incomes are going down, but costs are going up. More and more middle-class families are being squeezed, and this Congress has done nothing to stop that.

Let's look at the facts. There really is a middle-class squeeze under this Republican administration. Real household income has declined during the tenure of President Bush. It has declined by \$1,273 a year. That is pretty significant. This is median inflation adjusted household income. It was \$47,599 in 2000. Here is what it is 5 years later, \$46,326. That is not a record anyone should boast about.

The rich have been able to do much better. The average tax break for somebody over \$1 million is about \$38,000, where for someone under \$50,000, the tax break has been about \$6.

In addition to the household income declining, basic costs of the middle class have gone up. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is getting squeezed.

The cost of going to college in these 5 years has gone up 44 percent. Health insurance premiums, when one can find health insurance, has gone up 71 percent. We are up to over 47 million Americans now with no health insurance and millions of others who are underinsured. Energy costs certainly have gone up. Parents are paying \$3,700 more than they were 5 years ago. Health insurance, if one can buy it, is up \$4,500 in the last 6 years. You are paying more.

This story only tells half the story. As families struggle to afford what they need, they also find themselves less secure. Since President Bush took office, 3.7 million more Americans are without employer-sponsored retirement plans. Almost 7 million more Americans are without health insurance, and millions more are carrying significant debt.

Since 2000, household debt has increased by 35 percent, or more than \$26,000. When we put all this together—declining incomes, skyrocketing prices, rising insecurity—it is no wonder the economy remains a top concern for the American people. The kitchen-table concerns are issues that matter most to families, yet they are also the issues that are routinely ignored or made worse by this Congress that has been given the name “do-nothing Congress,” and rightfully so.

Just listen to Washington Republicans to see how out of touch they are. They are convinced the economy is doing great. They believe we should stay the course. We not only want to stay the course in the war in Iraq, according to the President, we want to stay the course with the economy, even as families struggle like never before.

We can do better than the Republican record of failure—much better. We can take a new direction, and it starts by putting the middle class first for a change.

Democrats have developed a variety of proposals addressing the middle-class squeeze, but every time the Republican majority has blocked our efforts so they can help special interests.

As to rising gas prices, we proposed a ban on price gouging. The prices have dropped down. They are going to go back up. There is nothing that has changed substantially. All we need is a problem in Nigeria or another storm. The majority blocked our price-gouging legislation. They blocked it on behalf of the oil and gas industry. But, of course, they should, Mr. President, because this is the most energy-friendly administration we have had in the history of our country.

To lower the cost of prescription drugs, Democrats proposed repealing the Republican ban on negotiating for lower prices in Medicare, but the majority blocked that on behalf of the pharmaceutical lobby.

To bolster middle-class incomes, Democrats proposed ending tax breaks that encouraged companies to outsource jobs overseas, but the majority continues to support these tax breaks at the behest of multilevel, multinational corporations.

To cut college costs and help more Americans get ahead, we proposed making college tuition deductible from taxes. That is gone. The majority pushed through the largest student aid cut in the history of our country and allowed the college tuition deduction to expire even while pushing for huge tax breaks for special interests and multimillionaires.

The bottom line is that all too often in Republican Washington, special interests rule while the middle class is left behind. As I said, the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class are getting squeezed, and it has never been so apparent as during these last 6 years. America literally cannot afford to stay the present course.

While Washington Republicans have been ignoring the plight of the middle class, they have been digging our Nation into a budget hole that will take decades to correct. As Senator CONRAD has explained so powerfully, since 2001, our national debt has exploded from \$5.8 trillion to \$8.5 trillion. The debt will double to \$11.6 trillion by 2010.

The debt owed to foreigners has already doubled. The United States has borrowed more from overseas interests—that is foreign countries—during

the Bush Presidency than we borrowed during all previous Presidencies combined. I think that is irresponsible, and our children and our grandchildren will pay the price.

We have several Democratic Senators who are experts on the economy who have come and spoken. Senator SARBANES, who sadly will retire at the end of this year, has been a wonderful Senator. He has handled the Banking Committee with expertise, and I so appreciate his coming to the floor today and talking about this issue. Our Democrat on the Joint Economic Committee, JACK REED, has done a wonderful job.

But I want to return to my main point. We need a new direction in America, one that strengthens the middle class. We believe it is long past time Washington focused on the people who work hard every day, play by the rules, and are the backbone of our Nation. They are being ignored, and they need our help. Our goal is not for Government to spend more; it is for families to spend less—less for college, less for health care, less for fuel, less for energy—all while enjoying an opportunity to succeed and prosper in the global economy and a chance at the American dream.

Mr. President, for 10 years, to show how little this Republican-dominated town feels about the poor, we have been unable to increase the minimum wage. When President Clinton was President, we tried and a filibuster by Republicans stopped us. The minimum wage—we believe Congress and Washington should focus on ways to help make the American dream come true, to help all Americans achieve their dreams. But to do that, we need to change course by, at long last, standing up to special interests and standing up for the common good. That is the Democratic vision. That is the new direction we seek. America's middle class in our Nation deserves no less.

#### U.S. ECONOMY CONTINUES TO PROSPER

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I have been very interested in the remarks of the distinguished Democratic leader, my friend, and I approach this issue from not just a slightly different perspective but from a very different perspective. I think it is important that we get our facts straight.

The robust health of the U.S. economy becomes more apparent with each passing day. Yet it is something about which we hear precious little except criticism, especially on the Senate floor. I would like to take just a few minutes to remind my colleagues about some of the positive aspects we are seeing about the state of the economy.

As we complete the fifth year of economic expansion, all signs indicate that the economy is as strong as it has ever been, and that we can expect continued economic growth for the foreseeable future. When President Bush became President, we were in the